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POWER PROJECTION OR INFLUENCE: SOVIET CAPABILITIES FOR THE 1980--ETC (U)
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US ARMY WAR COLLEGE
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**STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE
US ARMY WAR COLLEGE
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania**

**POWER PROJECTION OR INFLUENCE:
SOVIET CAPABILITIES FOR THE 1980's**

by

Keith A. Dunn

1 November 1980

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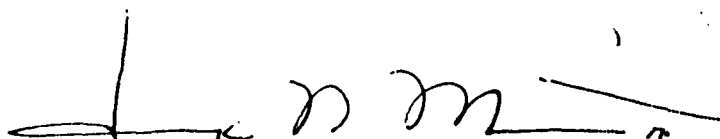
Composition of this memorandum was accomplished by Mrs. Janet C. Smith.

FOREWORD

This memorandum examines the military context of the ability of the USSR to project its forces and to sustain them in areas distant from the USSR. The author considers the normal static indicators of Soviet global reach capabilities (organization and composition of the Soviet ground, air, naval and naval infantry forces). In order to put those static indicators in some perspective he next assesses the USSR's overall capability to bring its military power to bear in noncontiguous areas, including geographic and force structure limitations. He concludes that as one moves further from the USSR, Soviet warfighting and force projection capabilities become less significant despite the fact that the Soviet Union has surpassed the United States in many indicators of military power.

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This memorandum was prepared as a contribution to the field of national security research and study. As such, it does not reflect the official view of the College, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. N. Merritt', is written over a horizontal line.

JACK N. MERRITT
Major General, USA
Commandant

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

DR. KEITH A. DUNN joined the Strategic Studies Institute as a civilian in the summer of 1977. Prior to that time he was an Army intelligence officer. Dr. Dunn earned a master's degree and doctorate from the University of Missouri in American diplomatic relations, and has written and published articles on the interrelationships between detente and deterrence, the origins of the Cold War, and the Soviet military.

POWER PROJECTION OR INFLUENCE: SOVIET CAPABILITIES FOR THE 1980's

A growing concern over what has been characterized as significantly improved Soviet "power projection" and "global reach" capabilities exists within the American defense community. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan did not generate this concern. On the contrary, for many observers the Soviet invasion merely bore out, and justified an existing concern. Even before the invasion of Afghanistan, General David C. Jones, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had argued that he saw "little cause for optimism in the future" unless the United States took definitive actions to "steer Soviet policy away from adventurisms."¹ Andrew Marshall, Director of Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense, described the issue facing the United States more bluntly when he stated in a recent article that in the 1980's the Soviet Union will continue to expand its power projection capabilities and become bolder in its involvement in the Third World. Rather than being a question of *if* the USSR will use its military forces in areas that are noncontiguous to its homeland, "the big question," as Marshall sees it, "is in what circumstances the Soviet Union will be willing to commit her forces in combat at a distance."²

As the United States begins the 1980's, a basic problem confronts US policymakers: What type of force projection capabilities is the

USSR attempting to develop? As Barry Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan and others have pointed out, a nation can use its military forces either as a martial or political instrument in an attempt to achieve its national goals.¹ As a martial instrument, a military unit or task force would be used to seize an objective, destroy an objective, or compel another military force or nation to do (or not to do) something. In a classic force projection sense, the insertion and support of military units into a country or area when opposed by an adversary would be a use of armed forces as a martial instrument. When using a military force as a political instrument, a nation attempts to influence another state to do something it otherwise would not be prone to do. Here naval port call visits, show-the-flag cruises, readiness posture changes, and joint exercises are excellent examples of the political use of armed forces to influence.

Suffice it to say a force projection mission is a broad one. Usually it is not something that one military service can perform alone. Moreover, in its fullest definition, a force projection mission encompasses a wide range of requirements to include the ability not only to coerce but also to influence. The problem with many of the current discussions about "enhanced global reach" or "force projection" capabilities of the USSR is that they have been too general to be analytically useful and often fail to suggest to policymakers where the real Soviet threat lies. Will the USSR be projecting major conventional forces to remote areas by the 1980's and 1990's and is this the force projection threat which the United States must be prepared to counter? Or, is the problem facing America more of a Soviet use of its armed forces for political influence? How policymakers answer these two questions should determine the force posture and program alterations the United States should make for the 1980's and 1990's.

The purpose of this paper is to examine in a military context the ability of the USSR to project its military forces and to sustain them in areas distant from the USSR. To do this the normal static indicators of Soviet global reach capabilities will be examined, i.e., organization and composition of the Soviet ground, air, naval, and naval infantry forces. Then to put those static factors in some perspective, the overall capability of the USSR to bring its military power to bear in noncontiguous areas will be examined. In this latter assessment, limitations upon Soviet capabilities—particularly geography and force structure—will be considered because in all too many instances weaknesses are overlooked when analysts

discuss Soviet power projection capabilities in a discrete manner by concentrating upon quantities of men and equipment.

A STATIC VIEW OF THE SOVIET MILITARY

Ground Forces

The most striking aspect of the Soviet Army is its size. There are slightly over 1.8 million soldiers in the Red Army. They are organized into 173 tank, motorized rifle, and airborne divisions. Although less than 30 percent of those divisions are fully manned and equipped at wartime strengths, the combat ready Category I divisions (less than 50 in number of which 8 are airborne divisions) are strategically located in the areas which Moscow sees as its most dangerous threats: 31 in Eastern Europe; the rest in the USSR's western military districts and on the Sino-Soviet border. The remaining Soviet divisions must be augmented with vehicles and approximately 500-700,000 former conscriptees to reach wartime strengths.⁴

The other most obvious and striking feature of the ground forces is the near total mechanization of the Soviet Army. Sixty-eight percent (118 divisions) of the Soviet Union's divisions are motorized rifle or mechanized divisions; 27 percent (47 divisions) are armored; and 5 percent (8 divisions) are airborne, which would probably have strategic missions assigned by the Ministry of Defense. Thus, as currently designed, Soviet forces are heavily armor oriented. Motorized rifle divisions have 266 medium tanks, 22 light tanks, and 475 armored personnel carriers of various types and capabilities. A Soviet armored division has approximately 9,500 personnel and 325 tanks. In other words, it has one more tank and 7,000 fewer personnel than its counterpart US division. Furthermore, the unparalleled manner in which Moscow has oriented its forces around the tank is suggested in the following statistics: The Soviet ratio of medium tanks to men in an armored division is approximately 1:30; the motorized rifle division is approximately 1:50. In comparison the US ratio for its armored and mechanized divisions is approximately 1:50 and 1:81.

Soviet resource replacement system and maintenance procedures have also been tailored to a force structure which is enormously dependent upon the tank and the inherent shock and mobility tactics which are fundamental to all armor operations. For instance, the Soviet Union has adopted a unit, rather than individual, replacement system to fill its combat losses. In other words, when a

Soviet line unit has suffered losses to such a degree that the unit is no longer combat capable, the entire unit will be replaced by another fresh, fully-manned unit. As Stephen Canby has pointed out, such a replacement system is optimized for tactical nuclear conflicts, short conventional wars, and blitzkrieg tactics,⁵ i.e., the types of conflicts that the Soviet military either wants to fight or thinks NATO will force it to fight if war should ever occur.

Finally, it is important to remember that the entire Soviet ground forces system from type equipment procured through tactics and logistics has been optimized around the concepts of shock, mobility, and ending a conflict as rapidly as possible.⁶ The Soviet Army has always placed more emphasis on the "tooth" portion of the "tooth-to-tail" ratio than has the United States. As a result, logistic support units have been kept to a minimum. If a piece of equipment cannot be rapidly repaired in the field, it is replaced rather than evacuated to be rebuilt at a depot facility. Also, military units are encouraged to forage for food and utilize captured materials, particularly POL, to the greatest extent possible. Thus, Soviet ability to sustain its ground forces in conflict for long periods of time or over greater distances has always been somewhat suspect.

Frontal Aviation

Frontal Aviation (FA) is the tactical air element of the Soviet armed forces and is responsible for supporting the ground forces through air and air-to-ground missions. FA, with more than 4,500 fixed-wing combat aircraft, is now the largest single component of Soviet total air power capabilities. The new, more modern aircraft, which the USSR has introduced into the FA inventory over the last decade, have greatly increased Soviet range, speed, and ordnance carrying capabilities (see Figure 1). Also, the addition of laser range finders, terrain avoidance radar, and television or laser-guided bombs on the newer generation aircraft has enhanced the versatility and conventional warfighting capabilities of FA aircraft. However, the centralized nature of Soviet command and control somewhat limits the versatility of the new aircraft. While there are FA liaison personnel with Soviet ground forces, there are no forward-based air traffic controllers as with US units. As a result, air support missions and targets are effectively limited to those specified in a request and allow only limited flexibility for tactical changes over the battlefield.⁷ Also, Soviet pilots receive considerably less actual

Design generation and aircraft	First year in Service	Ordnance load (tons)	Maximum combat radius (miles)	Electronic jamming capability ^a	External range (statute miles)	Maximum speed (Mach number)
First (1946-55) IL-28 Beagle	1950	2.2	600	1,320	3.0	0.80
MIG-15 Fagot	1948	0.5	280	140	2.0	0.87
MIG-17 Fresco	1952	0.5	460	180	2.0	0.90
MIG-19 Farmer	1955	0.5	400	200	2.0	1.35
Average		0.9	410	460	2.3	n.a.
Second (1956-65) MIG-21 Fishbed D	1963	1.0	200	200	2.0	2.00
SU-7 Fitter	1959	2.0	300	600	n.a.	2.00
YAK-28 Brewer	1964	2.2	500	1,100	3.0	1.10
Average		1.7	333	633	3.7	n.a.
Third (1966-75) MIG-23 Flogger B	1971	2.2	525	1,555	5.0	2.30
MIG-27 Flogger D	1973	2.2	600	1,320	7.0	1.60
SU-17 Fitter C	1971	3.0	600	1,800	8.0	1.60
MIG-21 Fishbed J	1970	1.0	400	400	5.0	2.10
SU-24 Fencer	1975	5.0	800	4,000	6.0	2.30
Average		2.7	485	1,745	6.2	n.a.

Source: Robert P. Berman, Soviet Air Power in Transition (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1978), pp. 30, 32 n.a. = not applicable. a. Maximum combat radius times ordnance load. b. Hard points to which bombs, missiles, spare fuel tanks, or electronic parts can be attached; the number is a measure of versatility. c. Includes internal storage area for bombs.

Figure 1. Soviet CV Aircraft

flying time than do their US counterparts. Most Soviet training is done by simulators. Although simulators can be good training devices, historically Soviet commentators have criticized their training as stylized and routine. Finally, as Figure 1 indicates, Soviet tactical aircraft have limited combat radii. This reduced range, coupled with the lack of inflight refuel capabilities, makes it difficult for the USSR to redeploy its FA assets rapidly over long distances. In many instances, the USSR must depend upon ships to move aircraft overseas.⁸

While from one perspective these factors should be viewed as significant limitations upon Soviet power, they are also a good indication of the type mission and threat that the USSR has primarily designed its Frontal Aviation to counter. Approximately three-fourths of FA aircraft are either in Eastern Europe or the Soviet western military districts oriented toward NATO. More importantly, preplanned objectives and stylized training are well suited for an air force whose initial wartime mission would be to function as an extension of the artillery and neutralize NATO's nuclear forces, command posts, airfields, and other fixed targets.⁹

Military Transport Aviation

VTA's mission is to support the Soviet armed forces with airlifted supplies, personnel, and equipment throughout the USSR and its overseas facilities. During the 1970's, the total VTA inventory declined by more than 20 percent as older planes were retired (see Figure 2). This decline, however, has been offset because overall lift capacity has increased as larger and more modern VTA have entered the inventory.

The AN-12 *Cubs* are the oldest and most numerous of the primary medium and long-range transports. They originally entered the Soviet inventory in the 1950's and still compose more than 80 percent of all Soviet military airlift aircraft. Currently, they are slowly being replaced by the more modern jet propelled IL-76 (*Candid*s). The AN-22 has the largest cargo capacity of any Soviet plane and is second largest in the world; only the American C-5A is larger. The AN-22 is the only Soviet aircraft capable of lifting outsized items like tanks, self-propelled artillery, rockets, and tracked anti-aircraft weapons. However, since none of these aircraft are air refuelable, their reach capability is significantly limited. Also, the USSR stopped producing the AN-22 in 1974 when there were only 50 in the inventory. Since no replacement for the AN-22

Range with Max Payload Miles	Max Payload (lbs)	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
AN-22 (Cock)	3100	176,350	5	10	10	15	30	40	50	50
IL-76 (Candid)	3100	88,185						35	35	80
AN-12 (Cub)	2236	44,090	800	800	800	800	800	780	780	735
Sub-Total			805	810	815	830	840	845	845	865
Total VTA Fixed-Wing Assets		1700	1700	1700	1700	1700	1500	1500	1500	1300

Source: Various editions of Military Balance, 1970-1979 and John W.R. Taylor, Jane's All the World's Aircraft, 1978-1979 (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc.).

The subtotals cited here are probably inflated. It is difficult, if not impossible, to get unclassified sources to agree upon the totals. This chart essentially accounts for all aircraft assigned to VTA. Many aircraft--in some cases may be as many as 100 AN-12's--are under the operational control of other services. Probably they should not be considered to be part of VTA totals. For significantly lower number of AN-12 aircraft see charts in John M. Collins and Anthony Cordesman, Imbalance of Power; An Analysis of Shifting U.S.-Soviet Military Strengths (San Rafael, CA.: Presidio Press, 1978) pp. 196-198.

Figure 2. Soviet Fixed-Wing Military Airlift Aircraft

has yet to enter the Soviet inventory, it seems safe to say that Soviet outsized load capability will be constrained throughout most of the 1980's.¹⁰

Nevertheless, in an emergency the USSR has the proven capability to airlift equipment and supplies when it is unopposed by hostile forces. During the 1973 Middle East War, Moscow flew 930 sorties in order to supply its Egyptian ally with more than 15 million tons of supplies.¹¹ Over a 3-month period in 1977-78, the USSR airlifted 600 armored vehicles, numerous tanks, and over 400 artillery pieces to Ethiopia.¹² If required, it is generally accepted that VTA can lift one completely equipped airborne division or the combat assault elements of two divisions to the maximum distance of 1,000 miles. Finally, Moscow has at its disposal numerous Aeroflot planes which can be used to move both military personnel and some equipment in case of an emergency. For instance, during the Angolan crisis, Aeroflot IL-62's flew 14 missions and airlifted 25,000 Cubans to Angola.

Navy

While Red Army and Air Forces developments are significant, Soviet naval expansion has probably generated more discussion and concern about the Kremlin's worldwide aspirations than any other single military development. Whereas, in 1968 most observers could agree with Robert Herrick's assessment that the Soviet Navy had primarily a defensive mission, no such consensus exists today.¹³ The debate about Soviet naval roles and missions now covers a gamut of opinions. Some commentators suggest that the USSR has been predominantly drawn forward in its naval deployments in reaction to US naval initiatives.¹⁴ Others have argued that the USSR is consciously pursuing a policy to develop a worldwide naval presence and force projection capability in order to replace the United States as the preeminent world naval power.¹⁵ Another view, while recognizing the importance of naval war-fighting capabilities, places a heavier emphasis on the influence role of the Soviet Navy and Moscow's ability to use limited naval capabilities to affect the perceptions of other nations.¹⁶ Finally, some commentators have argued that viewing the Soviet Navy as a bureaucratic actor is the best approach because "Soviet naval policy is determined as much by its institutional setting as by external factors."¹⁷

As with the Soviet Army and Air Force, the magnitude of the

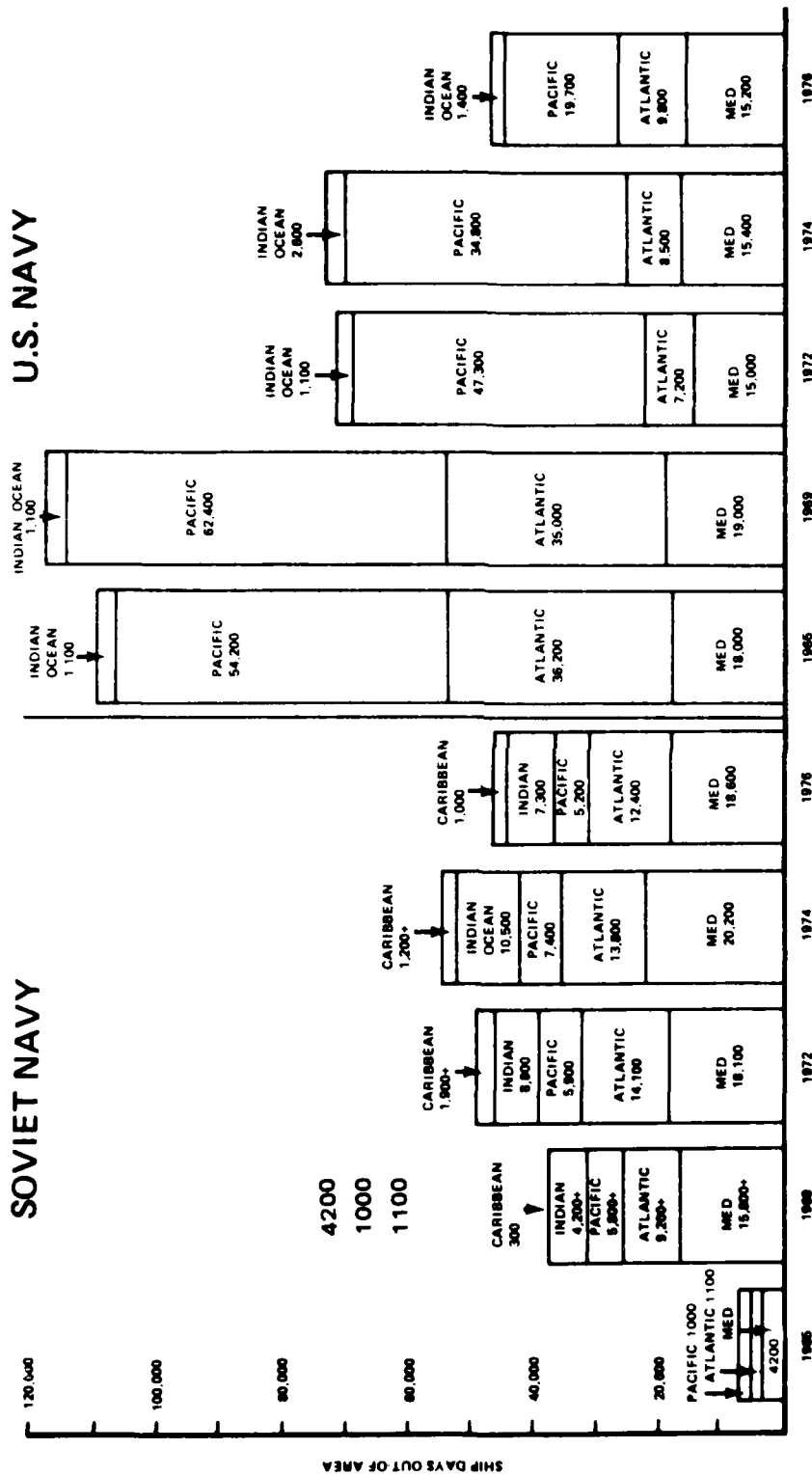
Soviet Navy has been a major contributing factor to the debate about Soviet naval intentions. Currently, the USSR has 270 ocean-going surface combatants and 195 attack, 65 cruise missiles, and 90 strategic nuclear ballistic submarines.¹⁸ Even though Soviet ship construction rates are down and it appears that overall Soviet naval assets may decline in the 1980's, many observers would agree with the editor of *Jane's Fighting Ships* that the Soviet Navy has "reached a strength uncalled for in the protection of a fast-increasing mercantile marine . . ." and "acquired a total of submarines far in excess of those required for home defense . . ."¹⁹

The appearance of qualitatively improved Soviet naval vessels is also an area of concern. The *Kresta II* (1970), *Krivak* (1971), *Kara* (1973), and *Moskva* (1973) class vessels have enhanced anxieties about Soviet capabilities and intentions in more than just naval circles, since those vessels are clearly more versatile than their predecessors. Completion of two *Kiev*-vertical/short takeoff and landing (V/STOL) aircraft carriers, with two more under construction, and the possibility that the USSR is now building a large-deck nuclear-power aircraft carrier further exacerbates existing concerns about the Soviet Navy.²⁰

Another area of major interest is the growing appearance of Soviet warships in areas where they have not traditionally sailed. For instance, until 1967, the USSR made only occasional forays into the Mediterranean. However, since 1967, Soviet naval vessels have continuously deployed approximately 15-20 surface combatants and a smaller number of attack submarines in the region. Also, since 1969, the USSR has regularly deployed smaller naval contingents to the Indian Ocean and off the west coast of Africa; periodically a Soviet task force with limited capabilities has been dispatched to the Caribbean to demonstrate Moscow's support of Cuba. The more than six-fold increase in the total number of Soviet ship days out-of-area between 1965 and 1977 (see Figure 3), while at the same time the United States has been retreating from not only its out-of-area deployments but also its overseas bases, is often used to demonstrate Moscow's growing interest in a navy which is "second to none."²¹

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE STATIC FACTORS

To this point the discussion of Soviet flexibility in the era of strategic equality has been primarily limited to static quantifiable factors: how many tanks, personnel, ships, aircraft, etc., does the USSR have? While an awareness of such factors are essential, they



Source: Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Department of the Navy, Understanding Soviet Naval Developments, 3d Edition (Washington: US Government Printing Office, January 1978), p. 14.

Figure 3. Trends in US-Soviet Naval Operations Ship Days Out-of-Area

provide only a partial—sometimes inadequate—perspective of a nation's military position. A discrete catalog of equipment inventories quite often causes one to overlook other equally important issues such as: how does a nation convert the recognized potential capability into usable power; has geography presented a nation with particular advantages vis-a-vis its adversaries; are there recognizable weaknesses and vulnerabilities in a nation's force structure?

No responsible observer believes that Moscow's enormous investment of resources over the last 10-15 years has resulted in a "Potempkin Village" military force. The Soviet military is large, powerful, and usable in particular scenarios. While Soviet military capabilities to impact upon international events are greater than they ever have been, the real issue is the ability to bring that enhanced qualitative and quantitative military force to bear at a particular time and place if the need should ever arise.

The effort of converting theoretical military capabilities to actual military power, however, is more difficult than some observers have suggested. A nation's military force structure, its geopolitical situation, the threats which the military force was primarily designed to counter, and the types of military units which exist present all nations with particular opportunities but also constraints. The Soviet Ground Forces may best illustrate this latter point.

Soviet armored divisions and their tactics have been optimized for a European land battle which has a high potential to escalate to a nuclear conflict. Soviet emphasis on speed, mobility, preemption, unit replacement, limited organic unit logistical support, large mobilizable reserves to augment understrength divisions, and a preponderance of armored/mechanized forces are military attributes tailored for a certain type Eurasian land battle, but they inherently make ground divisions less "projectable." Rapidly moving individual tanks, much less armored divisions around the globe is no easy task.²²

This is particularly true for the USSR given the limited range and load capacity of Soviet VTA aircraft. As was noted earlier, while medium and long-range VTA lift capacity has increased during the last decade, there is no longer a Soviet military plane in production which is capable of carrying tanks and other out-sized loads great distances from the USSR.

However, inadequate transport aircraft is only part of the problem, and, more importantly, Moscow could with relative ease

solve that issue by building more aircraft. Unfortunately, for the USSR, a single equipment fix to the inventory will not solve its basic problem. For an example, unit replacement and abandonment of damaged equipment concepts are not conducive to many Third World conflicts. Likewise, the reduced organic support functions within the Red Army limit its force projection capabilities because Soviet divisions lack staying power and sustainability. In other words, to obtain an ability to project Soviet ground forces divisions outside of Europe or to areas which are noncontiguous to the Soviet Union would require significant changes in the supply and logistic system and basic concepts inherent to it.

If such changes were to occur, the West would confront a radically different Red Army. However, it is important to realize that such changes can only be achieved at some cost to Soviet capabilities in Europe and against China. This could militate against such changes occurring since they would reduce Soviet capabilities—thus, increase Soviet anxieties—against its two most severe threats.

But most discussions of Soviet enhanced power projection capabilities do not focus on the Red Army. Rather they concentrate on the Soviet Navy, its new "blue water" capabilities and its overseas "bases." While no one can deny that the character of the Soviet Navy has changed and improved over the last decade, the Soviet military strategist still confronts some significant operation limitations. A closer examination of Soviet Naval Infantry and replenishment at sea capabilities, as well as Soviet geographic constraints, will highlight some of these limitations.

Soviet Naval Infantry

The Soviet Naval Infantry is small with approximately 12,000 troops which are organized into five regiments. Each one of the naval fleets, except the Pacific, has one regiment. The Pacific Fleet has two regiments.

In contrast to its US counterpart, the Soviet Naval Infantry has very little organic firepower or staying power. If a Naval Infantry regiment were committed in combat, it would have to be reinforced within 4 to 5 days due to its lack of organic maintenance and logistic support. Soviet exercises and doctrine indicate that the Naval Infantry are intended to be used as shock troops or as the spearhead of an assault when ground troops can follow on im-

mediately. Also, exercises indicate that the USSR wants to obtain control of the air over the landing area which to date has been done only with locally land-based aircraft.²³

Soviet sealift capacity for its Naval Infantry remains limited. The first *Ivan Rogov*, a 12,500 ton amphibious ship, just entered the Soviet inventory in 1978. Because the *Ivan Rogov* is over twice the size of any other Soviet amphibious ship, has a flood-well deck for launching air cushioned vehicles, and can carry six Hormone-size helicopters, its production rate bears close attention. However, the 4,100 ton *Alligator* class ship is the only other long range, relatively large lift amphibious capability which the USSR has in production. It is capable of moving no more than 375 personnel, which means if all 14 Soviet *Alligator* class ships were used for a one-time lift, Moscow could transport approximately 5,000 personnel. This is a modest capability when one considers that both the ships and Naval Infantry troops are distributed among the four fleets.

Even though in recent years small groups of the Soviet Naval Infantry have been observed on amphibious ships deployed in the eastern Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, and off the coast of western Africa, most analysts believe that the Soviet Naval Infantry is primarily oriented toward the Soviet flanks. Lack of staying power, limited lift capacity, and the need for land-based aircraft support suggest that the Soviet Naval Infantry's primary wartime mission is to seize and control critical areas like the Dardanelles, Denmark, and the Skagerrak and Kattegat Straits, rather than the force projection mission usually attributed to the US Marines.

Replenishment at Sea Capabilities

A Soviet proclivity toward parsimonious sized ships limits many missile ships' ability to carry extra weapons. Since many of the large Soviet missile ships lack an at-sea reload capability, they must return to shore when their missiles are expended. This situation is further exacerbated by the lack of modern replenishment and fleet support ships in the Soviet Navy. The first large, more than 10,000 tons displacement, *Boris Chilikin* fleet replenishment ship (for the transfer of both fuels and stores) entered the Soviet Navy in 1971 and less than one per year has been added to the inventory since then. Currently, the USSR has only five *Boris Chilikin* fleet replenishment ships in its Navy with another undergoing at sea trials. The Soviet Union is now constructing a 40,000 ton *Berezhina*

class replenishment oiler which should enter the inventory very soon as the largest oiler in the Soviet inventory. Both of these vessels are significant additions to the Soviet inventory but, due in part to their delayed arrival and low rate of production, the Soviet ratio of fleet support ships to combatants is only 1:42; in the US Navy the ratio is 1:15.²⁴

But the quantity of fleet support ships is only part of the picture. Techniques for at-sea replenishment and resupply are also important if a nation is building a navy with the capability to survive during a conflict. By American and other naval power standards, Soviet techniques in this area are quite antiquated. For example, when the US Navy carries out at-sea replenishments, it attempts to complete the job as rapidly as possible, usually with ships underway at speeds of approximately 12 knots or more. Moreover, even in peacetime, US ships are deployed to protect and screen the vessels being resupplied from hostile attack. The Soviets, however, seldom undertake any such actions. At-sea replenishments usually take place when ships are dead in the water or barely moving. Very little, if any, defensive screening occurs.²⁵

Geography and Bases

By far the Soviet Union's greatest naval problem and limitation has been geography, because as Theodore Ropp has so aptly written, "Geography is the bones of strategy."²⁶ No amount of planning can overcome the fact that geography has forced the Soviet Union to maintain four distinct fleets. Moreover, to compound the problem, the USSR's geostrategic position has denied its fleets uninhibited access to the open seas (see Figure 4). Only from the Soviet port of Petropavlovsk, on the Kamchatkan Peninsula, can Soviet ships directly enter an open sea. However, whatever flexibility Moscow has gained from this port could be interrupted during a conflict because it cannot be resupplied over land; all supplies come by sea from Vladivostok.²⁷

Recognizing that geography has constrained Soviet naval capabilities, some analysts believe that Moscow is pursuing a conscious plan to acquire strategically located "bases" in Third World nations. Some of the most often cited examples of Soviet success have been Aden, Massawa, Visakhapatnam, Umm Qasr, most recently Cam Ranh Bay, and until two years ago Berbera. From these "bases" the USSR could then threaten the main oil routes to the Middle East and Japan and possibly limit Western

- ### Main Soviet Fleet Choke Points
1. Barent's Strait
 2. Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom Gap
 3. Danish Straits
 4. Strait of Gibraltar
 5. Turkish Straits
 6. Suez Canal
 7. Tsushima (Korea) Strait
 8. La Perouse Strait

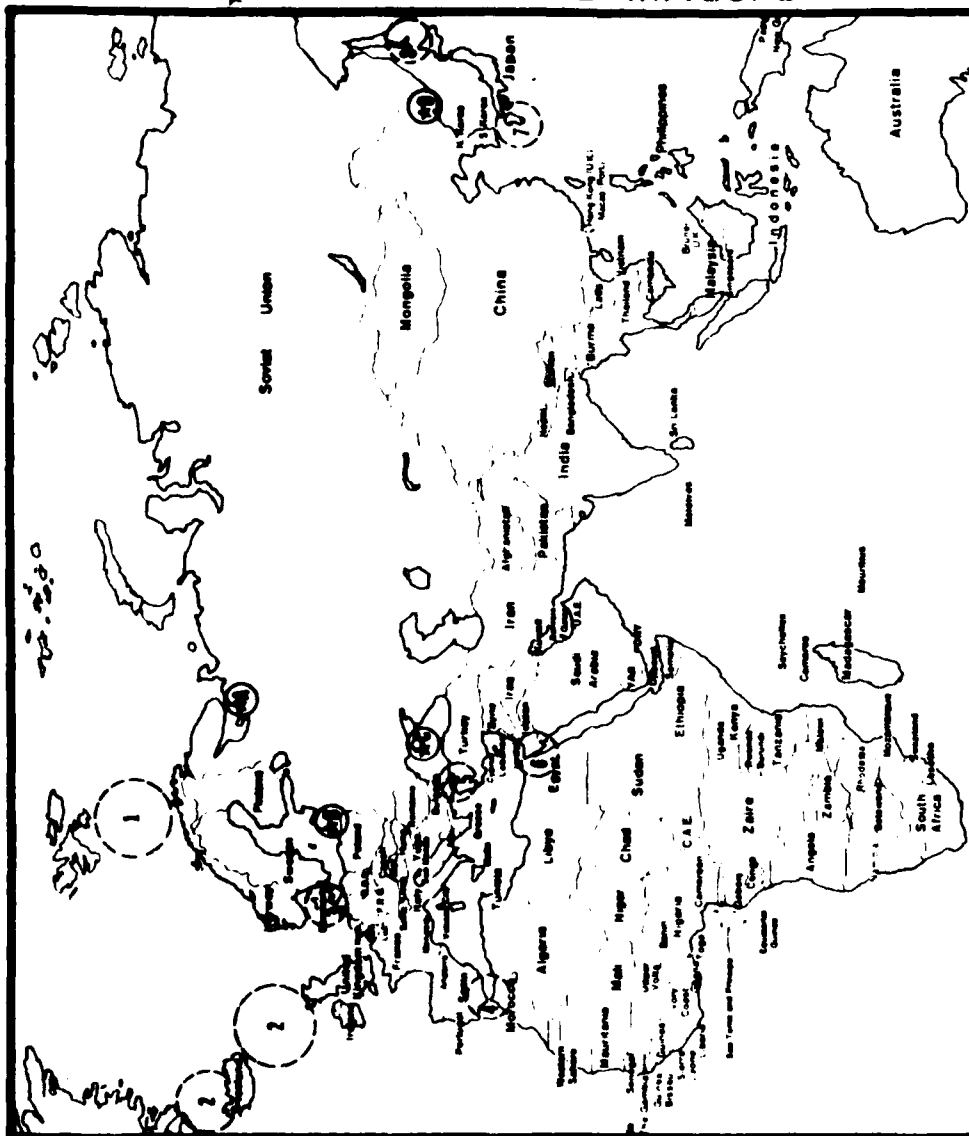


Figure 4. SOVIET FLEETS OPEN SEAS ACCESS

access to other valuable natural resources like chromium, cobalt, platinum, and manganese.²⁸

When considering and evaluating this assumption, it may be helpful to keep some caveats in mind which help sharpen the speculation on this issue. First, the assumption that the Soviet Union is attempting to put itself in a geographic position so it can deny vital raw materials to the developed world is primarily based on a belief that there is a great amount of coherency to Soviet actions. Such consistency is not always as apparent as some analysts have hypothesized.²⁹ For instance, if the USSR is primarily interested in putting itself, or its friends in positions to sever Middle East oil lines, one would have expected that Moscow would have refrained from taking actions which threaten its access to Berbera. In fact, by supporting the Ethiopian cause, it did exactly the opposite. While the USSR followed a course, which it could easily justify ideologically and morally, its actions quite clearly have damaged its geopolitical situation in the Horn of Africa and caused it to lose access to the best port facilities in the area.

Second, if a Soviet objective is to coerce the United States and its allies by threatening their access to oil during peace or in a crisis, it is a very risky policy option and one that would seem to run counter to Moscow's historical inhibitions to take actions which might cause a direct confrontation with the United States. During the 1978-79 Iranian crisis, American policymakers publicly announced that the steady flow of oil was considered a vital US security interest. In his 1980 State of the Union address, President Carter amplified and reaffirmed this position. Therefore, any direct or indirect attempt by an outside power to impede the flow of oil could very well turn a crisis situation into a conflict.

The increased American interest in forming a rapid deployment force is just one of many options apparently being considered as a means to protect the flow of Middle Eastern oil. It seems obvious that the implicit message which Washington has recently attempted to convey to Moscow is that if necessary the United States would be willing to use military force to protect its vital interest in the Middle Eastern oil fields. In other words, if the USSR or its allies want to somehow attempt to restrict the oil sea lines, they must be willing to face the risk of escalating a nonconflict, crisis situation to the point where the United States may commit military forces to defend its vital interests. This the USSR has not historically been willing to do, primarily because it fears a direct confrontation between the

superpowers has too great a potential to escalate out of crisis management control.

Third, if one views Soviet military leaders as cautious planners who are interested in maximizing their options in order to economize their military forces and insure success, dedicating a significant portion of its navy in war to sever the industrialized world's oil supply sea line would be a less than optimum use of its sea denial forces. By far the easiest and most efficient method to stop the flow of oil would be to stop it at its source. Minimal military actions, even sabotage, could easily destroy Middle East oil fields, drilling equipment, pipelines, or storage areas from which the supertankers are refueled. The USSR could also concentrate its naval forces near European and Japanese ports in an attempt to deny oil tankers from entering those ports. Both of these options would be easier to undertake than would a coordinated effort to destroy convoys of oil tankers on the high seas.

The debate about Soviet efforts to acquire bases is further complicated because too often the term "base" is used in a vague and improper fashion. The term naval "base" has a rather definite meaning to most American strategists, but it is not all that clear that analysts of the Soviet Union use the same rigor when describing Soviet "bases." As defined by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a naval base includes the activities and facilities for which the US Navy "has operating responsibilities, together with interior lines of communication and the minimum surrounding area necessary for local security."³⁰ Moreover, normally it is considered that American forces either have permanent or negotiated long-term access to a "base."

The USSR has no such similar ports anywhere in the world. It does have access to land facilities for docking rights, port calls, repairs, and replenishment of depleted stocks at places like Vishakhapatnam, Umm Qasr, Cam Ranh Bay, and until recently Berbera.³¹ However, there is apparently no negotiated permanence to the Soviet presence. The Soviets have used anchorages in sheltered international waters as floating logistic and supply facilities. While these accommodations have been helpful, in a conflict they would not be able to support the long-term needs of the navy and, more importantly, they could be readily destroyed.³² These limitations are significant because it is generally accepted that without access to secure ports and anchorages, a nation's power projection capabilities are severely constrained.

But even if we hypothesize that in the future the Soviet Union does obtain true overseas bases, this would ameliorate some problems for Soviet military planners, but could exacerbate other potential areas of concern. With secure overseas bases, it is often argued that the USSR could forward deploy its warships prior to a conflict and thus avoid the problem of bypassing chokepoints when war occurred. This is a spurious argument because traditionally the vast majority of bulk items of equipment, supplies, and materials have been transported by ship to overseas bases and facilities.¹³ Since resupply vessels would still have to traverse those chokepoints, the Soviet Navy would remain in a vulnerable position.

If the USSR acquired true overseas bases, it would require a significant change in its naval posture. Currently, the Soviet Navy's most credible capabilities occur at the ends of a continuum. At one extreme the USSR can display its naval power, carry out demonstration deployments (*Okean* '70 and '75 are good examples), react to localized shooting incidents, or engage in a brief "war at sea." At the other extreme, the Soviet Navy has the capability to participate in a strategic nuclear war. However, between these two extremes is a large "gray area" which includes: the ability to oppose naval intervention, participate in a prolonged theater conflict, engage in an extended "war at sea," or fight an all-out conventional war.³⁴

If the USSR intended to alter its current naval posture in a way to handle those "gray area" missions and to move away from its sea denial role toward a sea control mission, analysts would observe new trends in ship construction rates. Since navies are high cost items and require long lead time constructions, one would expect to see some major changes in Soviet naval construction rates. However, no alterations are now apparent. Soviet ship designers and builders still tend to concentrate their efforts in two traditional non-"force projection" areas: strategic nuclear submarines and antisubmarine warfare.³⁵

CONCLUSIONS

Restrictions upon Soviet force projection capabilities should not be interpreted to mean that the USSR is impotent. It is not. In fact, Kremlin leaders have developed a formidable military structure. During the Brezhnev era, both qualitatively and quantitatively

improved equipment has entered the Soviet inventory. The USSR has surpassed the United States on many of the standard static indicators of military power. It now has more tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery pieces, naval vessels, airplanes, and personnel in the armed forces than does the United States.

Soviet military capabilities and improved equipment obviously present the USSR with opportunities heretofore not available. The Soviet Union is now involved in areas of the world where it traditionally has never ventured. The Soviet Union can now provide friends and allies with equipment, supplies, and assistance to a degree that previously was impossible. This capability is obvious when one compares the level of assistance that Moscow was able to provide Angola, Ethiopia, Egypt, Vietnam in the 1970's with its lack of capability in the Congo during the 1960's.

However, to keep the Soviet challenge in the proper perspective, it is necessary to look at more than quantities of equipment. It is important to recognize that the Soviet Union's force structure also can constrain Soviet military capabilities and restrict the options available to Kremlin decisionmakers. Heavy ground force divisions with their mission to repel a NATO attack and then to counterattack with the ability to conduct blitzkrieg warfare are difficult to project to many areas of the world. The Soviet Navy in its general purpose role continues to be primarily oriented toward a wartime mission of reducing America's ability to resupply NATO and locating and destroying US nuclear submarines and strike carriers. Soviet naval capabilities will probably continue to grow in the coming decades. However, as Michael MccGwire has recently argued, this will occur primarily because of a wartime mission requirement rather than a peacetime requirement to insert and sustain Soviet forces abroad.³⁶

Even after taking the Afghanistan invasion into consideration, Soviet military capabilities for the 1980's will primarily remain at the influence end of the force projection continuum. On one hand, the significance of this relatively new Soviet capability should not be underestimated. In many contingencies a small input of force can greatly affect a delicate regional military balance. Tanks and aircraft, which are antiquated by American and Soviet standards, can provide quantum technological advantage to one regional contender when the other adversary has no tanks or aircraft. Moreover, the mere appearance of power can have an influential impact upon the perceptions of other nations. For instance,

although the differences between the Soviet *Kiev* V/STOL ship and the USS *Nimitz* or *Enterprise* strike carriers are so immense as to make them nearly uncomparable, quite frequently "in a world of unsophisticated propaganda targets, a carrier is a carrier is a carrier" On the other hand, one should not overestimate Soviet capabilities. The Soviet threat in areas distant from the USSR is not primarily a direct military one. Through arms sales and advisers Moscow will continue to attempt to enhance its influence in areas of the Third World. As a result local regional powers will increase their military capabilities to threaten US interests. In selected instances, when it is in Moscow's best interest, the USSR will probably encourage Third World nations to initiate regionally destabilizing actions to further Soviet interests and influence. But, after that encouragement Soviet capabilities are somewhat uneven. Moscow now has the logistic capability to support certain types of Third World insurrections and guerrilla activities when its clients are unopposed by a sophisticated military adversary. The Soviet Navy can serve as an interpositionary force in many Third World conflicts and thus increase the risk calculations required by American policymakers. In those areas close to the USSR—the North Atlantic, Eastern Mediterranean, South Asia, and North Pacific regions—where the Soviet naval and ground forces are concentrated and can obtain reliable air support, Soviet forces could obtain a geopolitical advantage over the United States. Any US military operation in such areas would be a risky undertaking. However, as one moves further from the USSR, Soviet warfighting and force projection capabilities become less significant and in some cases insignificant.

The recent invasion of Afghanistan occurred within that arc of primary Soviet geopolitical advantage. Moscow was able to move ground divisions by way of long, methodical road marches from bases within Russia to major Afghan cities easily within range of VTA capabilities. Moreover, if it had been required, tactical fighters could have been deployed from Soviet bases and range and refueling constraints would have been significant. These conditions of Soviet advantage, which maximized Soviet military capabilities in Afghanistan, may not exist as one moves further from Soviet borders. This is an important factor to keep in mind as increasingly concerned US policymakers inevitably begin to reassess Soviet "power projection" and "global reach" capabilities in the aftermath of the Afghanistan invasion.

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3. Barry M. Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan, *Force Without War: US Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1979, p. 13.

4. Unless otherwise stated, information is either based upon author's calculations from data found in or is data cited in the International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance 1979-1980*, London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1979.

5. Steven L. Canby, *NATO Military Policy: Obtaining Conventional Comparability with the Warsaw Pact*, R-1088-ARPA, Santa Monica, California: The RAND Corporation, June 1973, pp. 50-54.

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8. John M. Collins and Anthony H. Cordesman, *Imbalance of Power: An Analysis of Shifting US-Soviet Military Strengths*, San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1978, p. 142.

9. Joseph D. Douglass, Jr., *The Soviet Theater Nuclear Offensive*, Studies in Communist Affairs, Volume 1, Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1976, pp. 92-93, and Phillip A. Petersen, *Soviet Air Power and the Pursuit of New Military Options*, Studies in Communist Affairs, Volume 3, Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1979, pp. 7-11.

10. The two most recent Soviet transport aircraft observed by westerners appeared to be designed for different missions. The AN-72 resembles Boeing's experimental YC-14 advanced medium STOL transport (AMST) and probably is designed for battlefield transportation. The IL-86 (Camber) a wide bodied aircraft appears to be intended for Aeroflot use. The IL-86 began prototype testing in December 1976 and was shown in the 1977 Paris Air Show. Soviet authorities originally said that the IL-86 would enter the civilian passenger service during 1976-80. However, this claim has not been repeated indicating that the Soviet Union may be experiencing some technical problems with this particular plane. If the IL-86 is used in a military role, it may be used as an AWACS or tanker refueler.

11. To put these numbers in some sort of perspective, the United States flew 567 missions and supplied its ally Israel with more than 22.4 million tons. In other words, the United States flew nearly half as many missions and provided 50 percent more supplies over a distance which was four times greater than the Soviet effort. Also, the US effort was severely hampered because most US allies—except Portugal—refused landing rights to American planes. See Berman, *Soviet Air Power in Transition*, p.65.

12. Daniel S. Papp, "The Soviet Union and Cuba in Ethiopia," *Current History*, Volume 76, March 1979, p. 113.

13. Robert W. Herrick's *Soviet Naval Strategy* (Annapolis Naval Institute, 1968) was the first definitive monograph on the Soviet Navy and its naval strategy.

14. Michael McGwire has made the argument in the best fashion. See Michael McGwire, "Soviet Maritime Strategy: Purposive and Preventive," in *Soviet Naval Developments: Capability and Contest*, edited by Michael McGwire, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973, pp. 535-538; Geoffrey Jukes, *The Indian Ocean in Soviet Naval Policy*, Adelphi Papers No. 87, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, May 1972; Michael T. Klare, "Superpower Rivalry at Sea," *Foreign Policy*, No. 21, Winter 1975/1976, pp. 86-96; 161-167; and Gary Charbonneau, "The Soviet Navy and Forward Deployment," *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, Volume 105, March 1979, pp. 34-40.

15. For example, Alvin Cottrell and Walter F. Hahn, *Naval Race or Arms Control in the Indian Ocean (Some Problems in Negotiating Naval Limitations)*, Agenda Paper No. 8, New York: National Strategy Information Center, Inc., 1978.

16. For just a few examples that suggest this hypothesis, see C. G. Jacobsen, *Soviet Strategy—Soviet Foreign Policy: Military Considerations Affecting Soviet Policymaking*, Glasgow: Robert MacLehose and Co., 1974, p. 135; Kenneth Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, London: Croom Helm, Ltd., 1977; Stansfield Turner, "The Naval Balance Not Just a Numbers Game," *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 55, No. 2, January 1977, p. 346; and Robert H. Donaldson, "The USSR, the Subcontinent and the Indian Ocean: Naval Power and Political Influence," in *The Subcontinent in World Politics: India, Its Neighbors and the Great Powers*, edited by Lawrence Ziring, New York: Praeger, 1978, pp. 168-195.

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18. Department of Defense, *Report of Secretary of Defense Harold Brown to the Congress on the FY 1980 Budget, FY 1981 Authorization Request and FY 1980-1984 Defense Programs*, Washington: US Government Printing Office, January 25, 1979, p. 90. Hereafter cited as *DOD Annual Report* with appropriate year.

19. John E. Moore, *The Soviet Navy Today*, New York: Stein and Day, 1976, p. 28.

20. For a description of what US naval experts believe will be the first Soviet large-deck nuclear carrier, see Clarence A. Robinson, Jr., "Soviet Carrier Policies Shifting," *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, Volume III, No. 8, August 20, 1979, pp. 14-16.

21. For just two examples, see Department of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, *Understanding Soviet Naval Developments*, Washington: US Government Printing Office, January 1978, pp. 17-18; and Cottrell and Hahn, *Naval Race or Arms Control in the Indian Ocean*, pp. 14-16.

22. Those in the American defense community should be particularly sensitive to this issue. It is becoming more and more obvious to many observers that the American focus on the Central Region has left the United States with few mobile forces which can respond to non-European contingencies. To counter the Soviet threat, NATO required heavy divisions. Heavy divisions cannot be moved rapidly. Therefore, POMCUS stocks must be positioned in Europe so that the initial reinforcement divisions which may be crucial for the battle can arrive in time to affect

the conflict. These heavy POMCUS divisions, however, cannot be diverted rapidly to other contingencies. As a result, the perceived threat, force structure, and type units reduce US military flexibility.

23. See James G. Roche, "The Soviets Growing Reach: Implications of Comparative Capabilities to Project Military Power," paper presented before the European-American Workshop (May 25-27, 1977), p. 13; and Donald C. Daniel, "Navy," in *Soviet Armed Forces Review Annual*, Volume 2, 1978, Gulf Breeze, Florida: Academic International Press, 1978, p. 178.

24. Lieutenant Commander James T. Westwood, "Soviet Naval Strategy, 1968-78: A Reexamination," *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, Volume 104, No. 5, May 1978, p. 124.

25. Daniel, "Navy," in *Soviet Armed Forces Review Annual*, 1978, p. 179.

26. Theodore Ropp, *War in the Modern World*, new revised edition, New York: Collier Books, 1973, p. 5.

27. See Stuart E. Johnson and Joseph A. Yager, *The Military Equation in Northeast Asia*, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1979, pp. 50-51. Rapid mining of the Sea of Japan Straits is based upon an assumption that the Japanese in partnership with the US Navy will assist in the mining operations.

28. See, for example, Cottrell and Hahn, *Naval Race or Arms Control in the Indian Ocean*, pp. 34-35; and David J. Cade, "Russian Military Strategy," *Air University Review*, Volume 29, September-October 1978, pp. 18-27.

29. For a few examples see Samuel B. Payne, Jr., "The Soviet Debate on Strategic Arms Limitations: 1968-1972," *Soviet Studies*, Volume 27, No. 1, January 1975; H. Gordon Skilling, "Interest Groups and Communist Politics," *World Politics*, Volume 17, No. 2, April 1966, pp. 435-451; Edward L. Warner, III, *The Military in Contemporary Soviet Politics: An Institutional Analysis*, New York: Praeger, 1977; and Arthur J. Alexander, *Decisionmaking in Soviet Weapons Procurement*, Adelphi Papers No. 148, London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Winter 1978-1979.

30. Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, JCS Pub 1, Washington: US Government Printing Office, September 1974, p. 223.

31. The loss of Berbera must have been a severe blow to the USSR. It was not only the best facility that Moscow had access to, but may have been the best facility in the whole littoral of the Indian Ocean. The Berbera complex included a deep water port, accommodations for 1,500 military personnel, communication facilities, storage capacity for 175,000 gallons of fuel, a tactical missile storage facility, and access to two airstrips of 4,500 and 17,000 feet in length. Also, Berbera provided the Soviet ships relatively free access to the Indian Ocean which Massawa and Asab do not. See Papp, "The Soviet Union and Cuba in Ethiopia," *Current History*, pp. 110-114 and 129-130, and John W. Finney, "The Soviets in Somalia: A Facility Not a Base," *The New York Times*, Section IV, July 6, 1975, p. 3.

32. C. J. Jacobsen, *Soviet Strategy—Soviet Foreign Policy*, 2d ed., Glasgow, Great Britain: Robert MacLehose and Co., Ltd., 1974, p. 143; and F. M. Murphy, "The Soviet Navy in the Mediterranean," *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, Volume 93, No. 3, March 1967, pp. 42-43.

33. The American experience in Vietnam clearly supports this point. Between 1965 and 1969 more than 22 million short tons of dry cargo and over 14 million short tons of bulk petroleum were delivered to South Vietnam. All of the petroleum and

95 percent of the dry cargo were transported by ship. Only 5 percent of dry cargo was delivered by air. See Office of the Chief of Military History, *Vietnam Studies: Logistic Support*, by Lieutenant General Joseph M. Heise, Jr., Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1974, p. 157.

34. Steve F. Kime, "Soviet Naval Strategy for the Eighties," National Security Affairs Monograph 78-3, Washington: National Defense University, June 1978, pp. 5-9. See also Turner, "The Naval Balance Not Just a Numbers Game," *Foreign Affairs*, pp. 342-343; and Michael MccGwire, "Changing Naval Operations and Military Intervention," in *The Limits of Military Intervention*, edited by Ellen P. Stern, Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1977, p. 162.

35. See Alva M. Bowen, *Comparison of US and USSR Naval Shipbuilding*, Washington: Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, March 5, 1976; Michael MccGwire, "Western and Soviet Naval Building Programmes 1965-1976," *Survival*, Volume VIII, No. 5, September/October 1976, pp. 204-209; and Gary Charbonneau, "The Soviet Navy and Forward Deployment," *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, Volume 105, March 1979, p. 37.

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tions. He concludes that as one moves further from the USSR, Soviet warfighting and force projection capabilities become less significant despite the fact that the Soviet Union has surpassed the United States in many indicators of military power.

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